

**Czech University of Life Sciences Prague**

**Faculty of Economics and Management**

**Department of Humanities**



**Bachelor Thesis**

**Organic food certification and the impacts on  
consumers' preferences**

**Lidia Sidorenko**

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## BACHELOR THESIS ASSIGNMENT

Lidia Sidorenko

Economics and Management

Thesis title

**Organic food certification and the impacts on consumers' preferences**

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### Objectives of thesis

The certification process and the organic labelling is the constitutive element of the organic food sector. The consumers' trust in organic quality is based on the quality of the certification system. The certification processes represent a strictly formalized system framed by the law regulation, which is at the same time subjectively interpreted and understood by the consumers.

The thesis will focus on a thorough description of the certification system in selected country and explain how different organic labels affect consumers' trust in organic quality.

### Methodology

Empirical study explores approaches of organic food consumers. The study is based on the interpretative paradigm in social sciences. Primary data for the study will be collected within a qualitative field work.

## **The proposed extent of the thesis**

30-40 pages

## **Keywords**

motives, organic logo, trust

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## **Recommended information sources**

Aertsens, J., Verbeke, W., Mondelaers, K., & Van Huylenbroeck, G. (2009). Personal determinants of organic food consumption: A review. *British Food Journal*, 111(10), 1140-1167.

doi:10.1108/00070700910992961

Hempel, C. and Ham, U. (2016). Local and/or organic: a study on consumer preferences for organic food and food from different origins. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 40, 732-741.

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Reed, M. (2010). *Rebels for the soil. The rise of the global organic food and farming movement*. London, UK: Earthscan.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled "Organic food certification and the impacts on consumers' preferences" by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the bachelor thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break copyrights of any other person.

In Prague on 15.03.2018

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**Lidia Sidorenko**

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank my supervisor doc. Mgr. Ing. Lukáš Zagata, Ph.D. for supporting and helping me during the thesis and giving valuable advice throughout the period of my research. Also, I would like to thank all the nine participants of the research who agreed to be questioned in a form of a detailed interview face-to-face out their own good and will.

# **Organic food certification and the impacts on consumers' preferences**

## **Abstract**

The thesis will be focused on the certification process, the organic labelling in the United States of America and the EU, and the motives of the consumers when it comes to purchasing bio and organic labelled food.

The literature review will explain the bio and organic concepts by giving an introduction to the history of the organic movement, its basics and expansion in the selected countries. It will also provide information about the development of organic farming and the extensive progress in this field.

The practical part of the thesis will consist of a thorough study of consumers' opinions and motives by the means of a detailed interview.

The conclusion will identify whether the organic logo is something to be trusted and how aware the consumers are of the entire certification process of the goods that they are purchasing. The important question is whether people trust the quality of bio food. It will also review some future prospects and possible improvements in the organic movement and several agricultural policies.

**Keywords:** Organic farming, certification process, organic logo, sustainability, bio goods, trust, policy, principles, health.

# Certifikace organických potravin a dopady na preference spotřebitelů

## Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na certifikační proces, formu marketingové komunikace se zákazníky skrze loga označující organické produkty v USA a EU a také se zajímá o motivaci konzumentů nakupovat organické potraviny.

Historie, vlastnosti a rozšiřování bio a organických potravin v jednotlivých státech jsou vysvětleny v přehledu literatury. Vývoj organického farmářství je vysvětlen tamtéž.

Praktická část práce se skrze detailní rozhovory s konzumenty snaží odhalit motivy jejich jednání.

Závěr pak nabízí odpověď na tyto otázky a posouzení vyhlídek a možných zlepšení v oblasti organického zemědělství. Důležitá otázka je, zda lidé důvěřují logům organických potravin a jak jsou s oblastí organického zemědělství obeznámeni.

**Klíčová slova:** organické zemědělství, certifikační proces, loga, udržitelnost, bio zboží, důvěra, politika, zásady, zdraví.

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# 1 Introduction

Organic farming is one of the hottest topics in the world of food industry. The organic movement is becoming a viral trend and its followers are doing their best to raise awareness in the minds of consumers. It is not just about health or quality but the ecological aspect as well. Organic farming is considered to be more sustainable than the conventional intensive farming and, therefore, is more environment-friendly. Most farmers that decide to switch to organically managed farming, act out of ethical reasons and sense of responsibility for their surroundings. Also, they are making great decisions for the prosperity of their own business since organic farming is quite rewarding financially.

The list of organic food organizations is still growing. All of them are working to protect the global environment and promote sustainability in agriculture. One of the major membership-based organic organizations in the world is Organic Trade Association (OTA). It involves multiple organic food companies that aim to dispel the confusion about the benefits of organic products. Even though organic food sales jumped 170 percent from 2002 to 2011, being fairly new on the market, organic products raise a lot of debates regarding the truthfulness of the organic logo. For the purpose of educating consumers about the true meaning of the term ‘organic’, OTA hosted the All Things Organic Conference in 2015 in Baltimore.

Organic market is built on strong beliefs of consumers and, most importantly, their trust. The future of organic agriculture is closely connected to buyers’ attitudes and willingness to support the organic movement. In the past 20 years, the demand for organic produce has been up and rising, and farmers around the world are responding to eaters’ preferences. However, organic production occupies only 1 percent of global cropland these days. In order to ensure stable growth of organic sales, it is crucial to overcome several challenges that might occur in respect to the uncertainty that revolves around the organic market, but currently there are plenty of possibilities for the development of organic movement.

## **2 Objectives and Methodology**

### **2.1 Objectives**

The main objective of the study is to explain the fundamental concepts of organic farming and describe the certification process and nuances of the organic policy in the USA and the EU by defining the major differences in the systems, and finding out whether the organic logo is trustworthy enough from the point of view of consumers. It is also essential to determine the most important motives and reasons for purchasing organic goods.

The practical part of the thesis is focused on studying opinions of people of various nationalities and defining the main differences when it comes to organic food choice for each one of them. Eight of the participants were currently living in the Czech Republic, while one of them lives in the USA. The major goal of this research was to find out participants' motives to trust the organic logo as it is one of the most important signs of quality recognition in organic food industry.

### **2.2 Methodology**

The goal of the thesis was to determine consumers' opinions about organic food, and to find out whether people are educated enough about the organic certification and organic logos.

The data in the practical part was collected in a qualitative field of work. The questions were composed to create an open discussion with each of the participants. People were questioned face-to-face in order to record their reactions and thoughts on the spot. The topics discussed in the interviews varied depending on the individuals' statements.

The analytical part of the thesis consists of a thorough explanation and interpretation of the discussion results. The outcome of the study was illustrated through quotations of participants' responses.

### **3 Literature review**

The literature review will provide the crucial explanation of the term of organic farming and give some introductory information about the topic. The first section will cover the main regulations in organic farming regarding chemicals and other substances the using of which contradict the beliefs of organic movement followers. It will also include the detailed description of the organic movement development worldwide and a brief history of organic farming and give the readers a glimpse of what the main organic movement principles are.

The second section will focus on the organic food certification processes and the variety of organic logos in the EU and the US and the differences between the both regions. In addition to that, the thesis will shed light on some cases of violation of food policy in the organic industry.

The last section of the literature review explains the basic motives and tendencies that drive the consumer's choice of organic food.

#### **3.1 Organic farming**

The term 'organic farming' is not entirely new to our society. Comparing to the other forms of farming, the organic movement is not a very conventional form of agriculture. It focuses on enhancement of agro-ecosystem's condition and the health of soil by avoiding any chemicals or synthetic materials. The term 'organic' is very closely related to Justus von Liebig, a German scientist and chemist, who made a big impact on agricultural fertilization by developing the theory of mineral plant nutrition. The organic movement there on expanded on the other European countries raising environmental awareness in the society.

The organic movement itself has a very strong philosophy that goes, as follows, 'Organic farming can be seen as an approach to agriculture where the aim is to create integrated, humane, environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural production systems. The term 'organic' is best thought of as referring not to the type of

inputs used, but to the concept of the farm as an organism, in which all the components interact to create a coherent, self-regulating and stable whole' (Lampkin et al, 1999a)

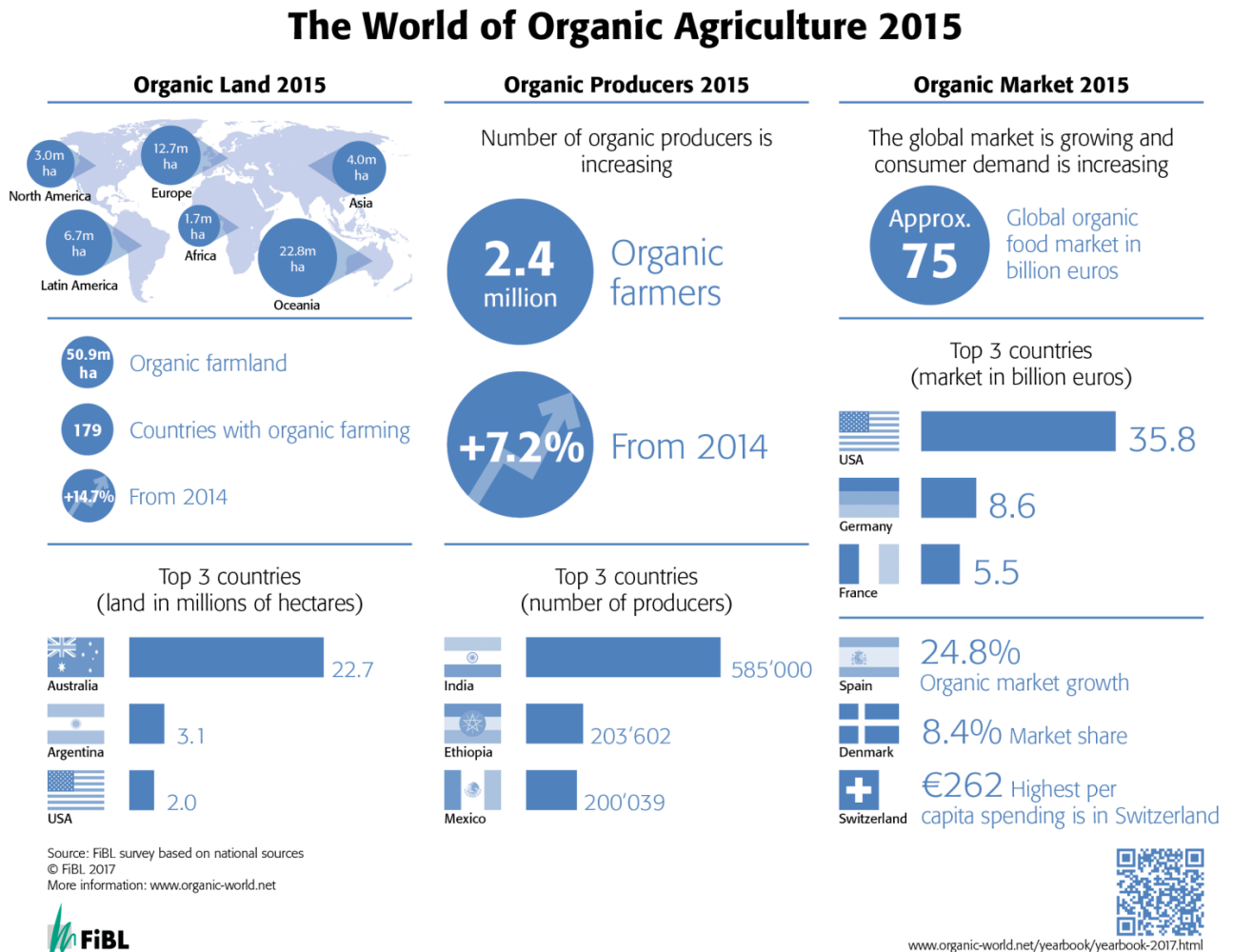
### **3.1.1 Organic Movement Development**

The first mentions of organic food and the idea of a new way of farming emerged in the late '20s of the previous century in England and Germany. The main factor that triggered the idea in the concerned minds of people was the ecological, environmental and economic crisis. The adherents of the organic movement were trying to propose an alternative and more sustainable way of farming free of chemical fertilizers that, supposedly, were too aggressive for the soil structure causing excessive erosion and low yield.

Through out the years, the organic movement has been progressing in quite impressive speed and gaining more and more followers around the planet. The production of food definitely goes way beyond the physical purpose of farming since it also influences people on a cultural level. With organic farming, I think, those influences are even stronger. 'The organic movement has constructed a coalition of groups and networks that present not a theoretical plan but an active alternative. Since the 1930s they have put forward a set of ecologically redemptive technologies that have addressed the environmental question of the moment.' (Reed, M. (2010). *Rebels for the soil. The rise of the global organic food and farming movement.* London, UK: Earthscan.)

Nowadays, organic food is cultivated in nearly every country in the world with a total of 70,1 million hectares of the arable land worldwide (April 3, 2016), which is truly striking comparing to where the industry was in the very beginning: 17 million hectares worldwide (2002). According to the FiBL organic farming statistics, there are a three countries in the world that possess the largest organically managed lands: Australia, Argentina and the USA (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Global expansion of organic farming in 2015**



**Source: fibl.com, Organic farming statistics, 2015**

In 2015, the number of organic farmers in the world reached 2.4 million and is still steadily increasing. The most profitable organic food market is in the USA (35.8 million euros) even though it has a smaller organically managed arable land than Australia (22.7 millions of hectares for Australia and 3.0 millions of hectares for USA), followed by Germany (8.6 million euros) and France (5.5 million euros).

The organic movement is still gaining momentum, especially when the society is becoming more educated and aware about the environmental issues that our world is currently faced with.

## **3.2 Organic Food Certification**

Organic food production has its costs and requires a lot of time and patience from the farmers' perspective. In order to gain recognition for the quality of the produce and have the right to be called 'organic', farmers need to go through several strict certification procedures. It is important to understand that organic food can be considered such only if it conforms to a range of standards and characteristics set by the Food Policy.

Organic products must meet the following requirement in order to be certified as organic:

1. Produced without GMO.
2. Produced only using a range of allowed substances.
3. Inspected by the national organizations entitled to certify organic goods.

### **3.2.1 Organic Certification in the EU**

The exact measures and standards that define organic produce are not exposed to the consumers. Yet, the set of European organic standards is considered to be somewhat minimal. The severity level of these standards varies depending on regional differences in production conditions and the preferences of local consumers, since the farmers' organizations that set out those very standards only operate on a regional or country level. On the other hand, the reason for setting a higher standard in the industry can be used as a way to get an additional premium for being 'the most organic' among other organic farmers.

Of course, standards become effective only if reinforced by legal regulations. Within the EU, the organic certification system is governed by Reg. (EC) No. 834/2007 and other related regulations. Farmers who decide on entering the organic industry have to undergo systematical inspections. These practices have to be done in order to avoid future risks of non-compliance and violations of organic principles. The characteristics that are taken in consideration when certifying organic farmers are: 'types of crops



cultivated by a farm, the livestock managed by a farm and the complexity of farming activities at a farm' (Stephan Dabbert, Christian Lippert, Alexander Zorn, 2014)

The EU organic sector is constantly striving to improve the regulation system and lower the transaction costs since some farmers don't want to invest their money in such risky and costly process as certification. The organic certification system in the EU has established its own mandatory logo on a governmental level and that is what makes it, potentially, the most effective regulation system in organic farming.

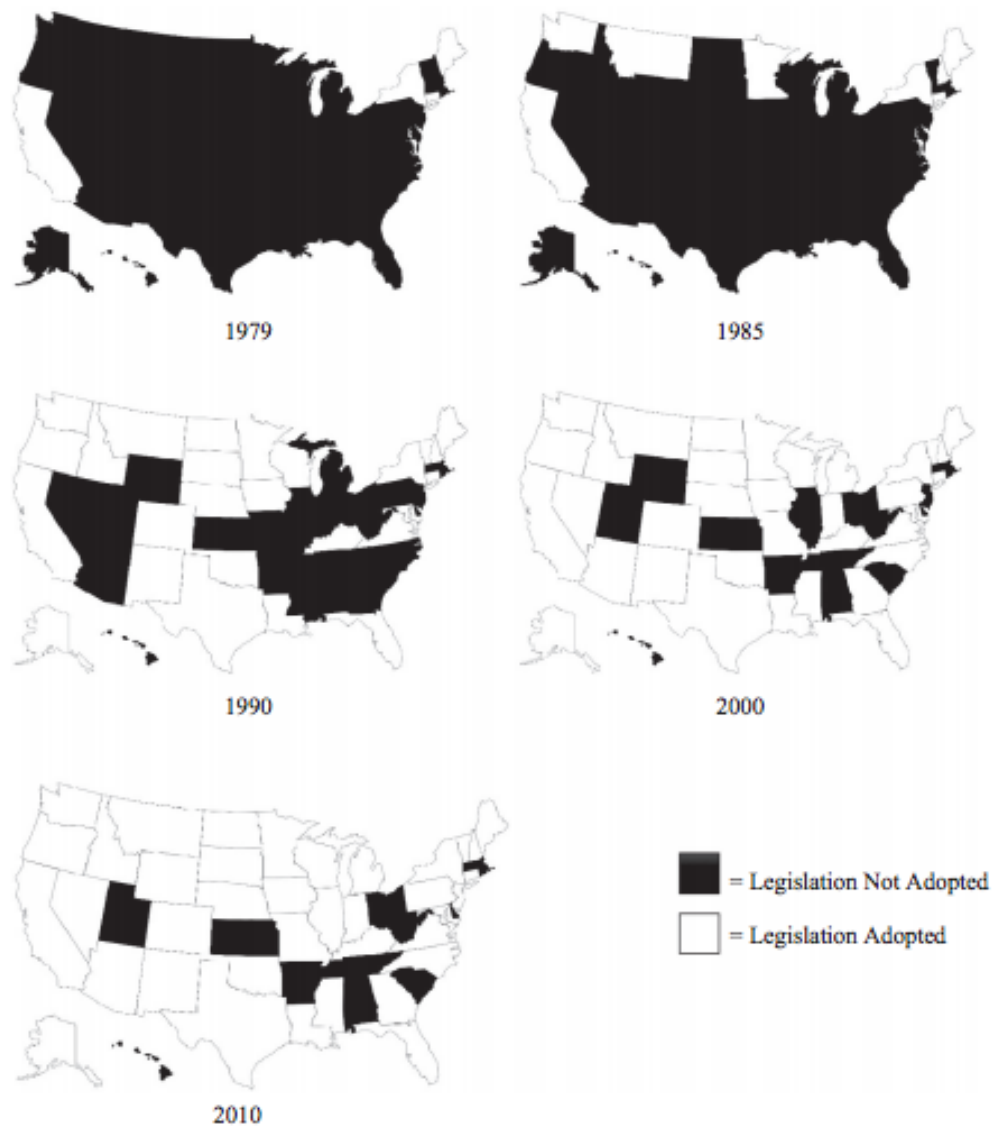
### **3.2.2 Organic Certification in the USA**

The US owns the largest organic food market worldwide. The present policymaker in the United States is the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) NOP (National Organic Program). The major difference between the American organic food policy and the one in Europe is that the US has a more elaborate system of certification and labelling because every state is defining their own policy and standards. For instance, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century some states gave the power of setting organic standards to the administrative agencies but California, on the other hand, relied on voluntary compliance (third-party regulations).

The OFPA (Organic Foods Production Act) that was established by the Congress as Title XXI of the 1990 Farm Bill made a salient impact on the development of the organic policy in the United States of America. The main goal of the associations of organic industry was to minimize the differences between the regulatory standards in the states. In order to set their own standards, the states would have to apply for legal approval of their right to operate with the organic logo.

The system is not entirely perfect till this day. The regional variation in the country causes 'geographic-specific challenges' (Samantha L. Mosier, Dawn Thilmany, 2015) since certified operations are only concentrated in some states (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Organic Legislation Distribution**



**Source: sciencedirect.com, 2016**

Such distribution is a result of the differences between the income of citizens of each state. Naturally, the states with the higher income citizenry have better opportunities for funding the costly organic food production and certification processes.

### **3.3 The Organic Logo**

The organic logo plays a very important role when it comes to consumer's decision-making. Truth is, the definition of quality of organic food is deeply rooted in its production rather than in any quality that can be directly observed before the product is purchased. (Stephan Dabbert, Christian Lippert, Alexander Zorn, 2014) Therefore, the organic logo is the only thing that provides us, as buyers, with tangible proof of a genuine quality of food that we invest our money in.

#### **3.3.1 The Organic Logo in the EU**

There are several types of organic logos in the EU:

1. EU logo (Figure 3)
2. National logo (Figure 4)
3. Logos of umbrella organizations for organic agriculture movements (Figure 5)
4. Labels of private certification bodies for organic products (Figure 6)

**Figure 3 The European Leaf**



**Figure 5 Estonian Organic Logo**



**Figure 4 Swiss Bio Logo**



**Figure 6 Swedish KRAV Logo**



**Figure 7 Demeter Logo**



**Source: Eppgroup.eu, 2015**

The first European logo was introduced in 1999 in order to inform the consumers about the origin of the products. The label was not accepted in the industry very well but nowadays, there are many labels used in organic food production as shown above. Most of these logos classify the nuances of the region they are representing but there are also logos such as Demeter (Figure 7) that signify the biodynamics of products. The most meaningful and influential logo in the EU is the European Leaf.

Some farmers prefer to use private logos instead of governmental ones because that is what distinguishes a label from a brand. Being a part of a brand gives producers an opportunity to control their production with minimal regulations. But as a matter of fact, producing goods that are labeled on a national level is more beneficial for the farmers. The main advantage of obtaining a governmental logo is that it is more recognized and trusted among consumers.

### 3.3.2 Organic Logo in the US

**Figure 8 USDA Organic**



Source: [ams.usda.gov](http://ams.usda.gov), 2015

USDA organic logo (Figure 8) is the most recognizable label in the American organic market. Getting certified organic in the USA is not easy. Obtaining a USDA logo requires undergoing a range of certification procedures. USDA adheres to the idea of '100 percent organic' produce which includes organic ingredients and raw materials. Only the ingredients specified on the National List are allowed to be non-organic.

Besides the USDA organic logo, there are several organic brands that possess their own labels: Earthbound Farm Organic, Annie's Organic food, Eden Organic and last but not least Whole Foods Market brand.

**Figure 9 Earthbound Farm Organic Logo**



**Figure 10 Annie's Homegrown Logo**



**Figure 12 Eden Organic Logo**



**Figure 11 Whole Foods Logo**



**Source: spellbrand.com, 2014**

### **3.4 Organic Food Speculations and Scandals**

Unfortunately, not all organic certified food is produced according to the high standards of organic food policy. There have been several food scandals in the history of organic movement development that occurred due to the neglecting of basic principles of organic farming.

One of these events took place in Germany in 2002 where organically produced cereals were stored in a building polluted with the chemical nitrofen. Furthermore, the cereals were used for production of organic foodstuffs. The incident made the buyers question the honesty of the organic logo and negatively impacted on the demand for bio food.

In 2011, the Italian Financial Police detected a fraud of an international level in an operation called 'Puss in Boots'. The investigation revealed that the regular food products of Romanian and Moldavian origin were sold as organic products in Italy and other countries.

When such incidents don't regularly occur in the EU, USA is quite infamous for their countless scandals revolving around Whole Foods (America's 'healthiest grocery store' established in 1980 that, allegedly, only sells organic and bio produce).

Whole Foods is truly an American pioneer in trading organic labelled food. Currently, there are 440 Whole Foods stores in the US. The chain is known for their sky-high prices and continuous scandals that have been coming up to the surface in the past decade. Even though the products sold in Whole Foods are considered to be of a higher quality, costumers are abandoning the store and switching to grocers that offer organic food for a more reasonable price. For instance, Kroger (a more affordable supermarket chain) began to expand its very own Simple Truth organic food brand attracting more and more customers.

But high prices are not the only reason Whole Foods has been losing buyers. In 2016, an organic tea brand Republic of Tea that is widely sold in every Whole Foods store, voluntarily dismissed the entire batch of their organic turmeric ginger green tea because one of the tea ingredients (organic ginger) was supposedly contaminated with salmonella. After multiple tests and investigations, the bacteria were not found in any of the tea components, but truth be told, this story didn't go unnoticed and both the brand and the store began rapidly losing buyers.

Due to that recession and the inability to fight the competition of the new organic food sellers, Whole Foods is planning on closing 9 stores in the US in different states in this year. But, regardless of these circumstances, the chain is planning on opening 1200 stores in the near future.

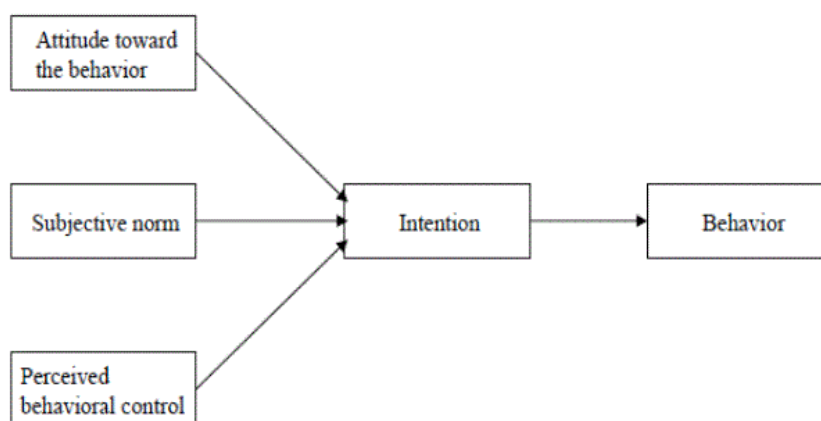
Such incidents are fairly rare in organic food production. The consumers can obtain the information about all the irregularities of organic producers in an official database ran by the EU commission. The interesting fact is that the organic food consumption patterns were not affected by the producers' negligence. This shows that the organic goods have a very strong place on the market, and it would take more to break the consumers' trust. But also, this might mean that the buyers do not entirely understand the information that they are given on the matter of organic policy and regulations, or are not willing to search for that information. The important question is, what are the main motives for buying organic food, and how did the organic logo gain the trust that it has?

### 3.5 Consumers' Motives and Attitudes

The price point for organic products is normally set higher comparing to the conventional foodstuffs that are sold in the supermarkets even though the quality of bio food has been debatable and multiple violations of organic food policy occurred in the past (see Chapter 3.3). Nevertheless, the demand for organic produce is still high. So, what drives costumers to invest in organic food?

**Figure 13 Basic TPB Model**

**Exhibit: 1 Theory of Planned Behaviour**



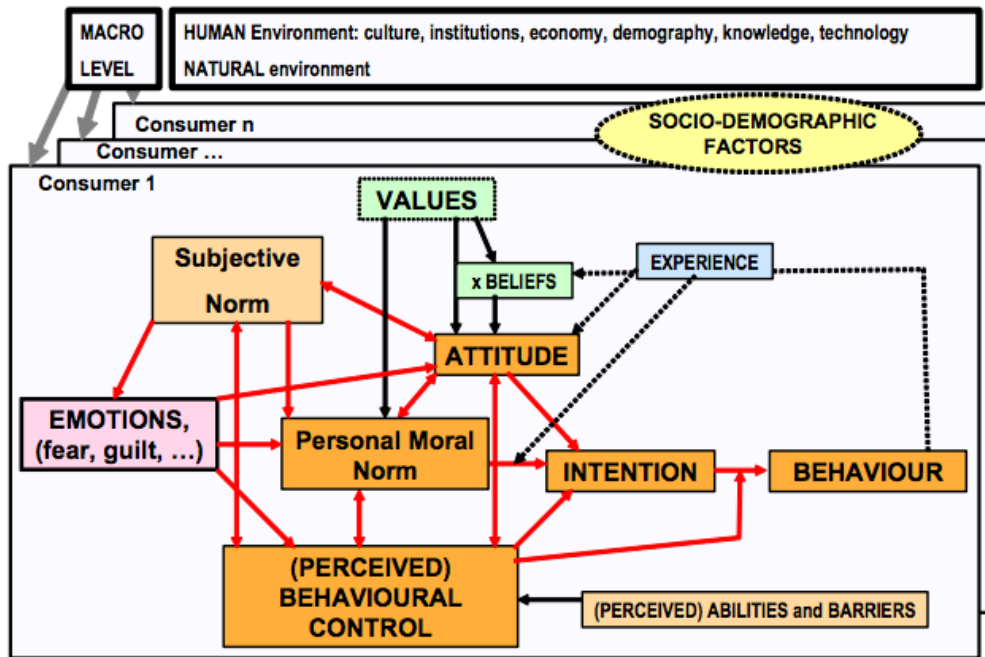
Source: Ajzen, 1991

There are a few theories that can describe the organic food consumption. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is considered to be one of the most effective models explaining consumers' behavior by some researchers. The model is designed to predict the way consumers act based of their intentions. As shown in Figure 12, intention derives from three factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. When it comes to analyzing organic food consumption, intention might emerge from more factors than just the ones stated above. Figure 13 shows a TPB model that was adapted to describe behavior of organic food



consumers. In this model, we can see that consumer's intention is influenced by emotions, personal moral norm, values, beliefs, experience and attitude.

**Figure 14 Adjusted TBP Model**



Source: Ajzen, 1991

According to the research of Joris Aertsens, Wim Verbeke, Koen Mondelaers and Guildo Van Huylenbroeck in their work called ‘Personal Determinants of Organic Food Consumption: A Review’, there are 8 main values that are connected to the decision-making process:

- **Security** – safety from the perspective of health-related attitudes.
- **Hedonism** – simply pleasure and better taste of the organic foods comparing to the conventional products.
- **Stimulation** – the excitement of experiencing something new, curiosity.
- **Universalism** – awareness towards environmental and social welfare.
- **Benevolence** – supporting the local produce. According to one of the studies published in the International Food and Agribusiness Management review 2014, some consumers consider all locally grown food to be automatically organic.

- **Self Direction** – the feeling of free choice and independence.
- **Conformity** – subjective norms and social pressure.
- **Power** – prestige and dominance over other people.

Values depend on people's social status, income and education. Comparing to attitudes, these values are more stable motivators as time and research have proven.

Consumers' attitudes towards organic food can be either cognitive or affective. Affective factors (such as emotions) control buyers' decisions on an unconscious level. This might be the feeling of fear for their own health or the feeling of guilt and regret when it comes to environmental safety. Cognitive attitudes emerge from carefully thought-out decisions and deliberate choices.

Values and attitudes are not the only elements that affect consumers' motives. There are also two types of factors influencing the decision-making process of buyers: socio-demographic factors and macro-level factors.

Socio-demographic factors are:

1. **Gender.**
2. **Age.**
3. **Children.**
4. **Education.**

**GENDER** – several studies indicate that female consumers are more likely to be eco-friendly and concerned about the aspect of health when purchasing food.

**CHILDREN** – couples with children were found to be more positive towards organic choices. This comes from a feeling of responsibility for their children's health.

**EDUCATION** – researchers claim different opinions towards the relation of education and the choice of organic produce. Some studies find that the relations are positive and some prove the opposite. But the bottom line is that education does not play a significant role in consumers' decision-making.

Macro-level factors include:

1. **Region.**
2. **Rural vs. urban living area.**
3. **The functioning of institutions.**

REGION – 97% of consumers' demand for organic food is distributed between USA and Europe. Difference in agricultural development level and sufficient amount of information are the main factors that influence the organic market in various regions.

RURAL VS. URBAN LIVING AREA – the studies point out that, for instance, in Denmark, the number of organic food sales is prevailing in the urban area of the country. This might be caused by the lack of fresh local products available for the consumers living in the urban area.

THE FUNCTIONING OF INSTITUTIONS – the efficient work of local organic food retailers is what creates a positive image of the organic market for consumers. Increasing the amount of available organic products in stores and lowering the distribution costs are the main two goals for the suppliers.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

The research was completed in the form of a detailed interview which consisted of 11 questions. The interview included questions about participants' age, education (or major), country of birth and residence. These questions were followed by open discussions about the organic concept, organic food definition, the quality of organic food, organic certification process, the motives for buying organic and bio and, of course, the organic logo. Some of the questions were modified in the course of the interview depending on participant's answers.

The purpose of such interview was to get detailed answers from individuals who took part in the research. Such discussion gives a better idea about people's honest opinions on the matter.

The age of participants varied from 19 to 35, and countries of residence were Russia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Slovakia, the USA and Panama.

The main goal of the research was to find out whether people are educated on the matter of their opinion on organic food quality, organic certification regulations, organic food quality and, most importantly, their trust in 4 different organic logos, 3 of which are common in the EU and one is typical for the USA.

## 4.1 The Organic Concept

The organic concept is the whole idea behind organic food. Also, it is the main moving force of the organic movement. The concept defines the main principles of organic farming and the purpose of organic production.

The opinions on the validity of the concept differed from one participant to another. For the most part, people said that they believed in the idea behind organic farming. Although, some of the participants were hesitant about agreeing with the concept for multiple reasons such as price of organic products, or they were not sure about the honesty of farmers.

*„I do believe in this concept but you never know if the farmer is honest about the quality of the food. In other words, I would like to believe.“ (FG 3)*

Otherwise, the most common answer was that people believed in the concept because they were convinced that the food is of a better “quality, taste and appearance” (FG 1).

The participants who didn’t agree with the idea explained their opinion by arguing that “the organic concept seems like a good marketing gimmick rather than the real thing” (FG 4). When asking them further questions on why they think of „organic“ as a marketing term, people replied that the organic movement seems like a „modern trend to them“ (FG 4), and that „regulations in mass production are more strict than in small organic farms“ (FG 5).

*„I do not believe in the organic concept because I feel like it is a made up term. It is rather a marketing strategy, really.“ (FG 8)*

#### 4.1.1 The Definition

The most common opinion about what the term „organic“ means was that it is something natural and grown with little to no chemicals or pesticides, in other words, „food that is grown naturally but under human supervision“ (FG 3).

*„I would describe it as something produced in a more wholesome manner.“ (FG 4)*

Although, a few of the participants were very partial to a modern interpretation of what should be considered organic. To some of them, „organic“ represented the food „that was grown in their garden at home or sold on farmers markets“ (FG 6 and FG 7). Two of the participants did not associate the term with any form of farming because „organic“, to them, describes something that comes from nature and has nothing to do with food in particular.

*„The term „organic“ is very misleading and makes a person with the basic knowledge of chemistry laugh, as any form of life is organic by its nature.“ (FG 9)*

From my observations, participants whose country of permanent residence was Russia or Ukraine connected the term with something they would either grow themselves or buy it from local farmers. However, the answers were also affected by the education and major which participants are pursuing in life. Participants with knowledge of agriculture, chemistry and biology were not very enthusiastic about the definition that usually comes to people’s minds (i.e. no chemicals or pesticides during production).

*„...I think it is more of a trend for me. Before the rise of industrial revolution, everything was organic, and we lost that as the time went by. That is why it is such a popular movement now.“ (FG 5)*

## 4.2 Organic Food Quality

The quality of organic food is a controversial topic due to the relative novelty of that sort of agriculture. People tend not to trust the promise of organic quality, they would rather rely on their experiences and stick to purchasing products that they are used to.

Even though the majority of participants thought that organic food is of a better quality because of „the amount of artificial additives and absence of inorganic fertilizers“ (FG 2), some individuals had a different view on what can be considered good quality.

*„Define quality! From my own experience, I do not think that it is necessarily a better quality. For the most part, it is the same.“ (FG 4)*

*„There is no reason for it to be better quality. It depends on what your definition of good quality is. If you are talking about nutrition, then no, it is not better.“ (FG 8)*

Three of the participants mentioned GMO and gluten as the two strong factors when defining the quality of the products that they purchase. For them, organic food is mainly GMO- and gluten-free. Interestingly enough, only two participants were educated on the matter of GMO products and the reality behind it, saying that GMO is not as bad as the society perceives it.

*„...the public generally does not like GMO which is completely foolish and inflated by journalists. <...> Additionally, it is also the responsibility of the scientific community to explain benefits of GMO products and help interpret reports on the potential danger of such products.“ (FG 9)*

All in all, the opinions varied from saying that organic food is of a better quality „because that’s what they want to believe“ (FG 7) and that „there is no solid scientific evidence that organic products are any better or worse than the „regular“ food“ (FG 9).

### 4.3 Purchasing Tendencies and Motives

Even though most participants stated that they support the concept, not all of them actually purchase organic food. For younger people, the main reason is the price and „they only buy organic and bio when there is a discount on it“ (FG 1 and FG 2). But also, the choice was affected by the type of products that they care more about when shopping.

*„Honestly, I mostly care about skincare and cosmetics when it comes to organic products. But it really depends on the ingredients for me, and I do not necessarily think that everything natural is good for you.“ (FG 4)*

Some participants said that their choice is deeply rooted in the culture of food and grocery shopping that they adopted from their parents. What I can say from my own observation is that the country where people spend their life growing up plays a very important role when it comes to food habits.

*„My family usually buys regular food without thinking much about it. We would rather go to a farmers market and buy food there, since the choice of healthy food is very poor in Russian supermarkets.“ (FG 2)*

When it comes to the question of how often people buy organic products, the answers varied from always to never. The interesting aspect that I found out during the research is that consumers are normally loyal to a certain type of products. While some participants „preferred organic meat and milk products“ (FG 7), others „exclusively bought nuts“ (FG 2) and “soy products like tofu” (FG 6). Only two participants mentioned „cosmetics and skincare as their priority when buying organic“ (FG 4 and FG 5).

*„I care about what I put in my body as well as on my body. When it comes to shampoos or skincare, I prefer organic products.“ (FG 5)*

If we analyze the motives for buying organic food, the leading reason for most participants was their health, and the motive following it was quality. They said that „they cared about their diet due to their age“ (FG 5). Even though some people hesitated to name their motives at first, they ended up saying that health and quality were their top priority.

*„I do not think I have some sort of motive, usually it is quite spontaneous. I normally buy organic to try something new, and I would rather purchase products of better quality. So maybe the main motive for me is indeed quality and also health.“ (FG 7)*

Three participants mentioned their tendency to support small businesses as a part of the reason for buying organic products. From their perspective, organic movement is standing against mass production and supermarket trends.

*„I have this image of not supporting big markets that abuse regulations. I would buy it (organic) to support small businesses.“ (FG 5)*

One of the participants also identified hedonism as part of their preference for organic food.

*„I like authenticity and food with a story. And it is a nice atmosphere.“ (FG 8)*

Similar results were acquired through other researches before this one but in this particular example, supporting smaller business was more important for people than their tendency to do things for their enjoyment (hedonism). From my perspective, it was rooted in the food culture that the participants grew up in. Individuals originating from Russia did not even mention small businesses as any of their motives for purchasing bio goods when on the other hand, participants from the USA, Panama and Europe called it their priority.



#### 4.4 Certification Knowledge

What I find important when buying organic products is having knowledge about where they come from, how it got the organic logo and what goes into the process of certification. The participants were asked whether they knew about the certification process, regulations that go in it, and if they have done their own research on that subject.

For the most part, participants were aware of the existence of such process but not many individuals knew the nuances of regulation systems in different countries. It seems to me like people would rather trust the logo without looking up the elaborate procedures that go into labelling. Interestingly enough, one of the participants said that they “were never keen on doing their own research about the process because they did not want to find out the reality behind organic food” (FG 7). Individuals who did know and cared about organic certification said that “they have never done research on that matter but they think they should do that more” (FG 4).

*“I understand the process of organic food production and I know that it is harder to get certified organic. But I think that people should do their own research on this subject. For me, certification is not as important as knowing where the food came from, for instance, how the crops were treated and etc.”(FG 5)*

Seven participants stated that they do not believe the regulation system in the USA “because of the poor GMO regulations” (FG 3) and also, for the reason that “they do not trust anything that comes from the US because of huge mass production in that country” (FG 2). Two of them added that they would not buy organic food produced in Poland.

*“It really depends on where the food comes from. I trust the regulations and standards in the EU, but I would not buy anything Polish even if it stated that it went through the EU certification.”(FG 1)*

Overall, people do not find it necessary to know the entire process and the exact regulations when it comes to organic certification. An interesting finding for me was that

participants who were familiar with organic food culture in the US said that they do not trust the system “for the reason that regulations vary from state to state, and are also different on a state level and governmental level, it is hard to know what to believe” (FG 8). Although, opinions on that subject differed in the course of the research depending on how educated individuals were on the topic of US regulations.

Russian citizens who stated that they do not typically buy organic food said that they “would rather trust the organic food quality around the EU because of higher standards when it concerns certification” (FG 2). But on the other hand, they felt more loyal to farmers markets and the quality of food sold there even though the products farmers sell on Russian markets are not certified in any way. It mostly has to do with the culture of grocery shopping in that country and poor system of regulations in the organic industry.

## 4.5 Logo Trust

Organic logo is something that helps consumers detect organic and bio products on the shelves of supermarkets. The results of this research show that not all buyers base their decision on organic labels. For majority of them, ingredients play a more important role when it comes to their choice of products. Surprisingly, not many people trust the organic logo when they see it.

*“I know at least two different types of organic logos and I notice them in stores. I do not trust the logo itself alone though, I would rather look at the ingredients.” (FG 3)*

Some of opinions were quite extreme when it came to logo trust saying that it is “absolutely misleading” (FG 9).

*“Would I trust the logo? I feel like it is a harmful concept, and it sort of states that other products are inferior in a way.” (FG 8)*

Nevertheless, one of the participants said that they trust the logo itself “because they are not the type of people who look at the ingredients” (FG 7). At the same time, that very participant stated that they do not know anything about the certification process behind organic labelling so they just prefer to trust the logo rather than put any extra value into it.

Some of the participants argued their distrust in the logo because they relied on the “appearance of food” (FG 1) more than the organic or bio label.

The individuals were offered to take a look at 4 different organic logos:

### **1. The European Leaf**

**Figure 15 The European Leaf 2**



**Source: [eppgroup.eu](http://eppgroup.eu), 2015**

### **2. The USDA Organic logo**

**Figure 16 USDA Organic 2**



**Source: [ams.usda.gov](http://ams.usda.gov), 2015**

### 3. The Czech Bio logo

**Figure 17 The Czech Bio Logo**



**Source: [organicrules.org](http://organicrules.org), 2016**

### 4. The Billa (Naše Bio) logo

**Figure 18 BILLA logo**



**Source: [billa.ask](http://billa.ask), 2008**

After that they were asked to describe what their thoughts on the logos were, and why they would put their trust in them if they found them trustworthy.

The results of this part of the research were quite surprising. Two of the main factors when trusting the logos were the design and color. Basically, people evaluated the logos from the marketing perspective first.

The first logo that was offered to participants was the European Leaf. Seven out of nine individuals gave a positive feedback on the logo in terms of trust. A participant called it „aesthetically pleasing“ (FG 8) to explain their trust in the logo. People said that it „looked familiar to them“ (FG 1) and they would trust it „because it is more of a broad label“ (FG 2). Some of the participants were aware of the anti-GMO policy in the EU and

they stated that „if the product was granted the EU logo, it means it is actually good“ (FG 3).

*„I trust it because the EU regulations are strict, and the EU is aiming towards chemical-free concept of food and consumption.“ (FG 5)*

However, the design did not seem to be satisfactory for everyone of them. Some people mentioned that „it does not say what it is“ (FG 7, FG 9) and, in their opinion, this makes it harder to put their trust into it.

*„It looks trustworthy. But I think they should add more to it, like something that says what it is.“ (FG 6)*

The second logo was the USDA Organic official logo. This logo did not get many positive votes. For most participants, it had „very bad design“ (FG 1). But the most important aspect was the „distrust in American quality and GMO control“ (FG 3). The participant who was born in the USA said that „they are sceptical about it because they see it a lot in the US and they feel like it does not mean much“ (FG 4). For the most part, the distrust was rising from the little to no confidence in anything that comes from the USA.

*„I find it hard to trust this because it is difficult to see what it stands for since the regulations are different federal- and state-wide. Also, the standards differ in every state.“ (FG 8)*

One of the participants claimed that they did not trust the logo „because it was screaming „organic“ straight away“ (FG 7) and this is something that really put them off when looking at it.

Two of the participants have a „positive personal experience with the logo“ (FG 6) so they would put their trust in it if they saw it in the store.

*„I am used to the USA logo and it states exactly what it is.“ (FG 9)*

The next logo was the Czech Bio Logo. The results of the interviews show that this logo is one of the most trustworthy as the majority of the participants “trust the Czech quality” (FG 7). In their opinion, Czech organic farming is “very well-developed” (FG 2) and is “protected by the EU standards” (FG 6).

*“I trust the Czech Republic certification process and the logo. Sometimes, in my opinion, Czech organic products are even better than, for example, German organic food.”*  
(FG 5)

The participant who is a citizen of the Czech Republic said that the following logo “is something they are used to” (FG 1) and, therefore, they trust what it stands for.

Yet, one of the participants claimed that the logo “does not state that it is organic” (FG 8), and they cannot put their trust in something it does not stand for.

*“It says “Product of Ecological Agriculture”. I do not consider organic farming to be sustainable or eco-friendly, for that matter. If it actually stood for what it says on the logo, I would buy it.”* (FG 8)

The last example was the BILLA (Naše Bio) logo. This particular label collected the most negative feedback from the participants for the reason of its “unappealing color” (FG 1) and “poor branding” (FG 6) in general. Despite that, it made consumers feel like “it is a cheap attempt to sell something more expensive” (FG 4).

*“I am very sceptical towards this logo and any supermarket brands so I do not trust it.”* (FG 6)

Participants compared it to other supermarket organic and bio brands stating that “the Kaufland brand is of a better quality than BILLA” (FG 5).

## 5 Conclusion

The evidence acquired during the researchs shows that, in general, people are aware of the definition of the term “organic” and it is not a new concept for them. However, not everyone supported the idea of organic production and some even considered it unsustainable.

The results of the research were highly influenced by the country of participants’ birth and the culture they were raised in. Russian and Ukrainian consumers were very partial towards organic food and some of them mentioned that they preferred regular food better.

Another factor influencing consumers’ opinion on the concept of organic was their education or major, since people who studied medicine, biochemistry and tropical agriculture were more critical about the idea.

Gender did not end up making a strong impact on the outcomes of the interviews. However, people’s age was very meaningful when it came to obstacles in buying organic food. For instance, students from the age of 19 to 23 could not purchase organic food because of their limited budget.

There are four main motives for buying organic food among the questioned participants: health, quality, supporting smaller businesses and enjoyment (hedonism).

Surprisingly enough, the organic logo did not mean much to people in terms of trust when noticing it in the store. Consumers claimed that they tend to rely on ingredients and where the food comes from.

The European Leaf logo ended up being the most trustworthy for participants, even though most of them were not happy with the aesthetical part of it. As it turned out, the logo design was one of the most important factors influencing consumers’ trust.

Based on this study, the organic movement has many prospects in the future but it is important to change marketing approach in organic food production. It is also essential to provide education about the organic certification process to the public in order to achieve people’s trust.

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## 7 Appendix

### List of questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from and where do you currently live?
3. What is your education or major?
4. Do you believe in the „organic“ concept?
5. Define the term „organic food“ in your own words.
6. Do you think that organic food is of a better quality? Explain your opinion.
7. Do you purchase organic food? If yes, how often?
8. How would you describe your main motives for purchasing organic food?

(This question was modified depending on whether participants bought organic products or not)

9. Do you know anything about the organic certification process? Have you ever done your own research on that matter?
10. Do you trust the organic logo when you see it in the store?
11. Which one of these following logos (here, the participants were asked to look at 4 logos: the European Leaf, the USDA Organic Logo, The Czech Bio Logo, BILLA Bio Logo) would you trust more? Explain your opinion.

### Interview example

FG 4, Female

1. I am 23 years old.
2. I am from the USA (Hawaii) but I currently live in Prague, Czech Republic.
3. I am studying Political Science.
4. Honestly, I do not believe in it, I think it is a marketing gimmick for the most part. It is for people who want healthier things for themselves. But I am sure some of the products are real.

5. I would describe it as „produced in a more wholesome manner, without using unnatural ingredients and materials“.

6. If I compare my experience, I do not think it is necessarily a better quality. For the most part, it is the same.

7. Considering my age, plus I am a student and I have a certain budget... I do not buy organic food that often. Honestly, I care more about ingredients in skincare and cosmetics. But it mostly depends on the ingredients. I do not necessarily think that natural ingredients are always good for you.

8. I would buy organic for the sake of my health. But I also have this image of not supporting big markets that abuse regulations. I would buy it to support small businesses.

9. I am aware of the process but I do not know the specifics. I should do more of my own research on that matter.

10. I feel like the logo does not define the fact that the product is actually organic. The reality can be very different.

11. To me, the European Leaf looks trustworthy because I know that the EU is quite strict with its regulations. I am sceptical about the USDA logo because I see it a lot in the US so I would not trust it because I feel like it does not mean much. I would not trust the Czech Bio logo as much, but I would if it went along with the European Leaf. The BILLA Bio logo seems like a cheap attempt to sell something more expensive.